TALES OF ALL COUNTRIES.

The Mistletoe Bough.

By ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

"Let the boys have it if they like it," said Mrs. Garrow, pleading with her only daughter on behalf of her two sons.

"Pray don't, mamma," said Elizabeth Garrow. "It only means romping. To me all that is detestable, and I am sure it is not the sort of thing that Miss Holmes would like."

"We always had it at Christmas when we were young."

"But, mamma, the world is so changed."

The point in dispute was one very delicate in its nature, hardly to be discussed in all its bearings, even in fiction, and the very mention of which between a mother and daughter showed a great amount of close confidence between them. It was no less than this. Should that branch of mistletoe which Frank Garrow had brought home with him out of the Lowther woods be hung up on Christmas Eve in the dining room at Thwaite Hall, according to his wishes, or should permission for such hanging be positively refused? It was clerly a thing not to be done after such a discussion, and therefore the decision given by Mrs. Garrow was against it.

I am inclined to think that Miss Garrow was right in saying that the world is changed as touching mistletoe boughs. Kissing, I fear, is less innocent now than it used to be when our grandmothers were alive, and we have become more fastidious in our amusements. Nevertheless, I think that she laid herself open to the raillery with which her brother attacked her.

"Honi soit qui mal y pense," said Frank, who was eighteen.

"Nobody will want to kiss you, my lady Fineairs," said Harry, who was just a year younger.

"Because you choose to be a Puritan, there are to be no more cakes and ale in the house," said Frank.

"Still waters run deep; we all know that," said Harry.

The boys had not been present when the matter was decided between Mrs. Garrow and her daughter, nor had the mother been present when these little amenities had passed between the brothers and sister.

"Only that mamma has said it, and I wouldn't seem to go against her," said Frank, "I'd ask my father. He wouldn't give way to such nonsense, I know."

Elizabeth turned away without answering and left the room. Her eyes were full of tears, but she would not let them see that they had vexed her. They were only two days home from school, and for the last week before their coming, all her thoughts had been to prepare for their Christmas pleasures. She had arranged their rooms, making everything warm and pretty. Out of her own pocket she had bought a shot belt for one and skates for the other. She had told the old groom that her pony was to belong exclusively to Master Harry for the holidays, and now Harry told her that still waters ran deep. She had been driven to the use of all her eloquence in inducing her father to purchase that gun for Frank, and now Frank called her a Puritan. And why? She did not choose that a mistletoe bough should be hung in her father's hall, when Godfrey Holmes was coming to visit him. She could not explain this to Frank, but Frank might have had the wit to understand it. But Frank was thinking only of Patty Coverdale, a blue-eyed little romp of 16, who, with her sister Kate, was coming from Penrith to spend the Christmas at Thwaite Hall. Elizabeth left the room with her slow, graceful step, hiding her tears—hiding all emotion, as latterly she had taught herself that it was feminine to do. "There goes my Lady Fineairs," said Harry, sending his shrill voice after her.

Thwaite Hall was not a place of much pretension. It was a moderate-sized house, surrounded by pretty gardens and shrubberies, close down upon the river Eamont, on the Westmoreland side of the river, looking over to a lovely wooded bank in Cumberland. All the world knows that the Eamont runs out of Ulleswater, dividing the two counties, passing under Penrith Bridge and by the old ruins of Brougham Castle, below which it joins the Eden. Thwaite Hall nestled down close upon the clear rocky stream about half way between Ulleswater and Penrith, and had been built just at a bend of the river. The windows of the dining parlor and of the drawing room stood at right angles to each other, and yet each commanded a reach of the stream. Immediately from a side door of the house steps were cut down through the red rock to the water's edge, and here a small boat was always moored to a chain. The chain was stretched across the river, fixed to the staples driven into the rock on either side, and the boat was pulled backwards and forwards over the stream without oars or paddles. From the opposite side a path led through the woods and across the fields to Penrith, and this was the route commonly used between Thwaite Hall and the town.

Major Garrow was a retired officer of engineers, who had seen service in all parts of the world, and was now spending the evening of his days on a small property which had come to him from his father. He held in his own hands about twenty acres of land, and he was the owner of one small farm close by, which was let to a tenant. That, together with his half pay, and the interest of his wife's thousand pounds, sufficed to educate his children and keep the wolf at a comfortable distance from his door. He himself was a spare thin man, with quiet, lazy, literary habits. He had done the work of life, but had so done it as to permit of his enjoying that which was left to him. His sole remaining care was the establishment of his children; and, as far as he could see, he had no ground for anticipating disappointment. They were clever, good-looking, well-disposed young people, and upon the whole it may be said that the sun shone brightly on Thwaite Hall. Of Mrs. Garrow it may suffice to say that she always deserved such sunshine.

For years past it had been the practice of the family to have some sort of gathering at Thwaite Hall during Christmas. Godfrey Holmes had been left under the guardianship of Major Garrow, and, as he had always spent his Christmas holidays with his guardian, this, perhaps, had given rise to the practice.

Then the Coverdales were cousins of the Garrows, and they had usually been there as children. At the Christmas last past the custom had been broken, for young Holmes had been abroad. Previous to that they had all been children, excepting him. But now that they were to meet again, they were no longer children. Elizabeth, at any rate, was not so, for she had already counted nineteen winters. And Isabella Holmes was coming. Now Isabella was two years older than Elizabeth, and had been educated in Brussels; moreover, she was comparatively a stranger at Thwaite Hall, never having been at those early Christmas meetings.

And now I must take permission to begin my story by telling a lady's secret. Elizabeth Garrow had already been in love with Godfrey Holmes, or perhaps it might be more becoming to say that Godfrey Holmes had already been in love with her. They had already been engaged; and, alas! they had already agreed that that engagement should be broken off!

Young Holmes was now twenty-seven years of age, and was employed in a bank at Liverpool, not as a clerk, but as assistant manager, with a large salary. He was a man well to do in the world, who had money also of his own, and who might well afford to marry. Some two years since, on the eve of leaving Thwaite Hall, he had with low doubting whisper told Elizabeth that he loved her, and she had flown trembling to her mother. "Godfrey, my boy," the father said to him, as he parted with him the next morning, "Bessy is only a child, and too young to think of this yet." At the next Christmas Godfrey was in Italy, and the thing was gone by—so at least the father and mother said to each other. But the young people had met in the summer, and one joyful letter had come from the girl home to her mother. "I have accepted him. Dearest, dearest mamma, I do love him. But don't tell papa yet, for I have not quite accepted him. I think I am sure, but I am not quite sure. I am not sure about him."

And then, two days after that, there had come a letter that was not at all joyful. "Dearest Mamma: It is not to be. It is not written in the book. We have both agreed that it will not do. I am so glad that you have not told dear papa, for I could never make him understand. You will understand, for I shall tell you everything, down to his very words. But we have agreed that there shall be no quarrel. It shall be exactly as it was, and he will come at Christmas all the same. It would never do that he and papa should be separated, nor could we now put off Isabella. It is better so in every way, for there is and need be no quarrel. We still like each other. I am sure I like him, but I know that I should not make him happy as his wife. He says it is my fault. I, at any rate, have never told him that I thought it his." From all which it will be seen that the confidence between the mother and daughter was very close.

Elizabeth Garrow was a very good girl, but it might almost be a question whether she was not too good. She had learned, or thought that she had learned, that most girls are vapid, silly, and useless—given chiefly to pleasure seeking and a hankering after lovers; and she had resolved that she would not be such a one. Industry, self-denial, and a religious purpose in life were the tasks which she set herself; and she went about the performance of them with much courage. But such tasks, though they are excellently well adapted to fit a young lady for the work of living, may also be carried too far, and thus have the effect of unfitting her for that work. When Elizabeth Garrow made up her mind that the finding of a husband was not the only purpose of life, she did very well. It is very well that a young lady should feel herself capable of going through the world happily without one. But in teaching herself this she also taught herself to think that there was a certain merit in refusing herself the natural delight of a lover, even though the possession of the lover were compatible with all her duties to herself, her father and mother, and the world at large. It was not that she had determined to have no lover. She made no such resolve, and when the proper lover came he was admitted to her heart. But she declared to herself unconsciously that she must put a guard upon herself, lest she should be betrayed into weakness by her own happiness. She had resolved that in loving her lord she would not worship him, and that in giving her heart she would only so give it as it should be given to a human creature like herself. She had acted on these high resolves, and hence it had come to pass—not unnaturally—that Mr. Godfrey Holmes had told her that it was "her fault."

She was a pretty, fair girl, with soft dark-brown hair, and soft, long, dark eyelashes. Her gray eyes, though quiet in their tone, were tender and lustrous. Her face was oval, and the lines of her cheek and chin perfect in their symmetry. She was generally quiet in her demeanor, but when moved she could rouse herself to great energy, and speak with feeling, and almost with fire. Her fault was a reverence for martyrdom in general, and a feeling, of which she was unconscious, that it became a young woman to be unhappy in secret; that it became a young woman, I might rather say, to have a source of unhappiness hidden from the world in general and endured without any detriment to her outward cheerfulness. We know the story of the Spartan boy who held the fox under his tunic. The fox was biting into him—into the very entrails; but the young hero spake never a word. Now Bessy Garrow was inclined to think that it was a good thing to have a fox always biting, so that the torment caused no ruffling to her outward smiles. Now, at this moment the fox within her bosom was biting sore enough, but she bore it without flinching.

"If you would rather that he should not come I will have it arranged," her mother had said.

"Not for worlds," she had answered. "I should never think well of myself again."

Her mother had changed her own mind more than once as to the conduct in this matter which might be best for her to follow, thinking solely of her daughter's welfare. "If he comes they will be reconciled, and she will be happy," had been her first idea. But then there was a stern fixedness of purpose in Bessy's words when she spoke of Mr. Holmes which had expelled this hope, and Mrs. Garrow had for a while thought it better that the young man should not come. But Bessy would not permit this. It would vex her father, put out of course the arrangements of other people, and display weakness on her own part. He should come, and she would endure without flinching while the fox gnawed.

That battle of the mistletoe had been fought on the morning before Christmas Day, and the Holmeses came on Christmas eve. Isabella was comparatively a stranger, and, therefore, received at first the greater share of attention. She and Elizabeth had once seen each other, and for the last year or two had corresponded, but personally they had never been intimate. Unfortunately for the latter, that story of Godfrey's offer and acceptance had been communicated to Isabella, as had, of course, the immediately subsequent story of their separation. But now it would be almost impossible to avoid the subject in conversation. "Dearest Isabella, let it be as though it had never been," she had said in one of her letters. But sometimes it is very difficult to let things be as though they had never been.

The first evening passed over very well. The two Coverdale girls were there, and there had been much talking and merry laughter, rather juvenile in its nature, but on the whole none the worse for that. Isabella Holmes was a fine, tall, handsome girl, good humored, and well disposed to be pleased; rather Frenchified in her manners, and quite able to take care of herself. But she was not above round games, and did not turn up her nose at the boys. Godfrey behaved himself excellently, talking much to the Major, but by no means avoiding Miss Garrow. Mrs. Garrow, though she had known him since he was a boy, had taken an aversion to him since he had quarrelled with her daughter; but there was no room on this first night for showing such aversion, and everything went off well.

"Godfrey is very much improved," the Major said to his wife that night.

"Do you think so?"

"Indeed I do. He has filled out and become a fine man."

"In personal appearance, you mean. Yes, he is well-looking enough."

"And in his manner too. He is doing uncommonly well in Liverpool, I can tell you; and if he should think of Bessy——"

"There is nothing of that sort," said Mrs. Garrow.

"He did not speak to me, you know—two years ago. Bessy was too young then, and so indeed was he. But if she likes him——"

"I don't think she does."

"Then there's an end of it." And so they went to bed.

"Frank," said the sister to her elder brother, knocking at his door when they had all gone up stairs, "may I come in—if you are not in bed?"

"In bed," said he, looking up with some little pride from his Greek book; "I've 150 lines to do before I can get to bed. It'll be two, I suppose. I've got to mug uncommon hard these holidays. I have only one more half, you know, and then——"

"Don't overdo it, Frank."

"No; I won't overdo it. I mean to take one day a week, and work eight hours a day on the other five. That will be forty hours a week, and will give me just two hundred hours for the holidays. I have got it all down here on a table. That will be a hundred and five for Greek play, forty for Algebra——" and so he explained to her the exact destiny of all his long hours of proposed labor. He had as yet been home a day and a half, and had succeeded in drawing out with red lines and blue figures the table which he showed her. "If I can do that, it will be pretty well; won't it?"

"But, Frank, you have come home for your holidays—to enjoy yourself?"

"But a fellow must work nowadays."

"Don't overdo it, dear; that's all. But, Frank, I could not rest if I went to bed without speaking to you. You made me unhappy today."

"Did I, Bessy?"

"You called me a Puritan, and then you quoted that ill-natured French proverb at me. Do you really believe your sister thinks evil, Frank?" and as she spoke she put her arm caressingly round his neck.

"Of course I don't."

"Then why say so? Harry is so much younger and so thoughtless that I can bear what he says without so much suffering. But if you and I are not friends I shall be very wretched. If you knew how I have looked forward to your coming home!"

"I did not mean to vex you, and I won't say such things again."

"That's my own Frank. What I said to mamma, I said because I thought it right; but you must not say that I am a Puritan. I would do anything in my power to make your holidays bright and pleasant. I know that boys require so much more to amuse them than girls do. Good-night, dearest; pray, don't over-do yourself with work, and do take care of your eyes." So saying, she kissed him and went her way. In twenty minutes after that he had gone to sleep over his book; and when he woke up to find the candle guttering down, he resolved that he would not begin his measured hours till Christmas Day was fairly over.

The morning of Christmas Day passed very quietly. They all went to church, and then sat round the fire chatting until the four-o'clock dinner was ready. The Coverdale girls thought it was rather more dull than former Thwaite Hall festivities, and Frank was seen to yawn. But then everybody knows that the real fun of Christmas never begins till the day itself be passed. The beef and pudding are ponderous, and unless there be absolute children in the party there is a difficulty in grafting any special afternoon amusements on the Sunday pursuits of the morning. In the evening they were to have a dance—that had been distinctly promised to Patty Coverdale; but the dance would not commence till eight. The beef and pudding were ponderous, but with due efforts they were overcome and disappeared. The glass of port was sipped, the almonds and raisins were nibbled, and then the ladies left the room. Ten minutes after that Elizabeth found herself seated with Isabella Holmes over the fire in her father's little book room. It was not by her that this meeting was arranged, for she dreaded such a constrained confidence; but of course it could not be avoided, and perhaps it might be as well now as hereafter.

"Bessy," said the elder girl, "I am dying to be alone with you for a moment."

"Well, you shall not die; that is, if being alone with me will save you."

"I have so much to say to you. And if you have any true friendship in you, you also will have so much to say to me." Miss Garrow perhaps had no true friendship in her at that moment, for she would gladly have avoided saying anything, had that been possible. But, in order to prove that she was not deficient in friendship, she gave her friend her hand.

"And now tell me everything about Godfrey," said Isabella.

"Dear Bella, I have nothing to tell—literally nothing."

"That is nonsense. Stop a moment, dear, and understand that I do not mean to offend you. It cannot be that you have nothing to tell, if you choose to tell it. You are not the girl to have accepted Godfrey without loving him, nor is he the man to have asked you without loving you. When you write me word that you have changed your mind, as you might about a dress, of course I know you have not told me all. Now I insist upon knowing it—that is, if we are to be friends. I would not speak a word to Godfrey till I had seen you, in order that I might hear your story first."

"Indeed, Bella, there is no story to tell."

"Then I must ask him."

"If you wish to play the part of a true friend to me, you will let the matter pass by and say nothing. You must understand that, circumstanced as we are, your brother's visit here—what I mean is, that it is very difficult for me to act and speak exactly as I should do, and a few unfortunate words spoken may make my position unendurable."

"Will you answer me one question?"

"I cannot tell. I think I will."

"Do you love him?" For a moment or two Bessy remained silent, striving to arrange her words so that they should contain no falsehood, and yet betray no truth. "Ah, I see you do," continued Miss Holmes. "But of course you do. Why else did you accept him?"

"I fancied that I did, as young ladies do sometimes fancy."

"And will you say that you do not, now?" Again Bessy was silent, and then her friend rose from her seat. "I see it all," she said. "What a pity it was that you both had not some friend like me by you at the time! But perhaps it may not be too late."

I need not repeat at length all the protestations which upon this were poured forth with hot energy by poor Bessy. She endeavored to explain how great had been the difficulty of her position. This Christmas visit had been arranged before that unhappy affair at Liverpool had occurred. Isabella's visit had been partly one of business, it being necessary that certain money affairs should be arranged between her, her brother, and the Major. "I determined," said Bessy, "not to let my feelings stand in the way, and hoped that things might settle down to their former friendly footing. I already fear that I have been wrong, but it will be ungenerous in you to punish me." Then she went on to say that if anybody attempted to interfere with her, she should at once go away to her mother's sister, who lived at Hexham.

Then came the dance, and the hearts of Kate and Patty Coverdale were at last happy. But here again poor Bessy was made to understand how terribly difficult was this experiment of entertaining on a footing of friendship a lover with whom she had quarrelled only a month or two before. That she must as a necessity become the partner of Godfrey Holmes she had already calculated, and so much she was prepared to endure. Her brothers would of course dance with the Coverdale girls, and her father would of course stand up with Isabella. There was no other possible arrangement, at any rate as a beginning. She had schooled herself too as to the way in which she would speak to him on the occasion, and how she would remain mistress of herself and of her thoughts. But when the time came the difficulty was almost too much for her.

"You do not care much for dancing, if I remember?" said he.

"Oh, yes, I do. Not as Patty Coverdale does. It's a passion with her. But then I am older than Patty Coverdale." After that he was silent for a minute or two.

"It seems so odd to me to be here again," he said. It was odd—she felt that it was odd. But he ought not to have said so.

"Two years make a great difference. The boys have grown so much."

"Yes, and there are other things," said he.

"Bella was never here before; at least not with you."

"No. But I did not exactly mean that. All that would not make the place so strange. But your mother seems altered to me. She used to be almost like my own mother."

"I suppose she finds that you are a more formidable person as you grow older. It was all very well scolding you when you were a clerk in the bank, but it does not do to scold the manager. These are the penalties men pay for becoming great."

"It is not my greatness that stands in my way, but——"

"Then I'm sure I cannot say what it is. But Patty will scold you if you do not mind the figure, though you were the whole Board of Directors packed into one. She won't respect you if you neglect your present work."

When Bessy went to bed that night she began to feel that she had attempted too much. "Mamma," she said, "could I not make some excuse and go away to Aunt Mary?"

"What, now?"

"Yes, mamma; now, to-morrow. I need not say that it will make me very unhappy to be away at such a time, but I begin to think that it will be better."

"What will papa say?"

"You must tell him all."

"And Aunt Mary must be told also. You would not like that. Has he said anything?"

"No, nothing—very little, that is. But Bella has spoken to me. Oh, mamma, I think we have been very wrong in this. That is, I have been wrong. I feel as though I should disgrace myself, and turn the whole party here into a misfortune."

It would be dreadful, that telling of the story to her father and to her aunt, and such a necessity must, if possible, be avoided. Should such a necessity actually come, the former task would, no doubt, be done by her mother, but that would not lighten the load materially. After a fortnight she would again meet her father, and would be forced to discuss it. "I will remain if it be possible," she said; "but, mamma, if I wish to go you will not stop me?" Her mother promised that she would not stop her, but strongly advised her to stand her ground.

On the following morning, when she came down stairs before breakfast, she found [illegible] standing in the hall with his gun, [illegible] was trying the lock. "It is not lo[illegible], is it, Frank?" said she.

"Oh dear, no; no one thinks of loading now-a-days till he has got out of the house. Directly after breakfast I am going across with Godfrey to the back of Greystock, to see after some moor-fowl. He asked me to go, and I couldn't well refuse."

"Of course not. Why should you?"

"It will be deuced hard work to make up the time. I was to have been up at 4 this morning, but that alarm went off and never woke me. However, I shall be able to do something to-night."

"Don't make a slavery of your holidays, Frank. What's the good of having a new gun if you're not to use it?"

"It's not the new gun. I'm not such a child as that comes to. But, you see, Godfrey is here, and one ought to be civil to him. I'll tell you what I want you [illegible] is to do, Bessy. You must come and meet [illegible] our way home. Come over in the boat and [illegible] the path to the Patterdale road. We'll be under the hill at about five."

"And if you are not, we wait in the snow?"

"Don't make difficulties, Bessy. I tell you we will be there. We are to go in the cart, and so shall have plenty of time."

"And do you know the other girls will go?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, Patty Coverdale has promised. As for Miss Holmes, if she won't, why you must leave her at home with mamma. But Kate and Patty can't come without you."

"Your discretion has found that out, has it?"

"They say so. But you will come; won't you, Bessy? As for waiting, it's all nonsense. Of course you can walk on. But we'll be at the stile by five. I've got my watch, you know." And then Bessy promised him. What would she not have done for him that was in her power to do?

"Go! Of course I'll go," said Miss Holmes. "I'm up to anything. I'd have gone with them this morning, and have taken a gun if they'd asked me. But I'd better not."

"Why not?" said Patty, who was hardly yet without fear lest something should mar the expedition.

"What will three gentlemen do with four ladies?"

"Oh, I forgot," said Patty innocently.

"I'm sure I don't care," said Kate; "you may have Harry if you like."

"Thank you for nothing," said Miss Holmes. "I want one for myself. It's all very well for you to make the offer, but what should I do if Harry wouldn't have me? There are two sides, you know, to every bargain."

"I'm sure he isn't anything to me," said Kate. "Why, he's not quite 17 years old yet!"

"Poor boy! What a shame to dispose of him so soon. We'll let him off for a year or two; won't we, Miss Coverdale? But as there seems by acknowledgment to be one beau with unappropriated services——"

"I'm sure I have appropriated nobody," said Patty, "and didn't intend."

"Godfrey, then, is the only knight whose services are claimed," said Miss Holmes, looking at Bessy. Bessy made no immediate answer with either her eyes or tongue; but when the Coverdales were gone, she took her new friend to task.

"How can you fill those young girls' heads with such nonsense?"

"Nature has done that, my dear."

"But nature should be trained, should it not? You will make them think that those foolish boys are in love with them."

"The foolish boys, as you call them, will look after that themselves. It seems to me that the foolish boys know what they are about better than some of their elders." And then, after a moment's pause, she added, "As for my brother, I have no patience with him."

"Pray do not discuss your brother," said Bessy. "And, Bella, unless you wish to drive me away, pray do not speak of him and me together as you did just now."

"Are you so bad as that, that the slightest commonplace joke upsets you? Would not his services be due to you as a matter of course? If you are so sore about it, you will betray your own secret."

"I have no secret—none at least from you, or from mamma; and, indeed, none from him. We were both very foolish, thinking that we knew each other and our own hearts, when we knew neither."

"I hate to hear people talk of knowing their hearts. My idea is, that if you like a young man, and he asks you to marry him, you ought to have him. That is, if there is enough to live on. I don't know what more is wanted. But girls are getting to talk and think as though they were to send their hearts through some fiery furnace of trial before they may give them up to a husband's keeping. I'm not at all sure that the French fashion is not the best, and that these things shouldn't be managed by the fathers and mothers, or perhaps by the family lawyers. Girls who are so intent upon knowing their own hearts generally end by knowing nobody's heart but their own; and then they die old maids."

"Better that than give themselves to the keeping of those they don't know and cannot esteem."

"That's a matter of taste. I mean to take the first that comes, so long as he looks like a gentleman, and has not less than eight hundred a year. Now Godfrey does look like a gentleman, and has double that. If I had such a chance I shouldn't think twice about it."

"But I have no such chance. And if you have not, you would not think of it at all. That's the way the wind blows; is it?"

"No, no. Oh, Bella, pray, pray leave me alone. Pray do not interfere. There is no wind blowing in any way. All that I want is your silence and your sympathy."

"Very well. I will be silent and sympathetic as the grave. Only don't imagine that I am cold as the grave also. I don't exactly appreciate your ideas; but if I can do no good, I will at any rate endeavor to do no harm."

After lunch, at about three, they started on their walk, and managed to ferry themselves over the river. "Oh, do let me, Bessy," said Kate Coverdale. "I understand all about it. Look here, Miss Holmes. You pull the chain through your hands——"

"And inevitably tear your gloves to pieces," said Miss Holmes. Kate certainly had done so, and did not seem to be particularly well pleased with the accident. "There's a nasty nail in the chain," she said. "I wonder those stupid boys did not tell us."

Of course they reached the trysting place much too soon, and were very tired of walking up and down to keep their feet warm, before the sportsmen came up. But this was their own fault, seeing that they had reached the stile half an hour before the time fixed.

"I never will go anywhere to meet gentlemen again," said Miss Holmes. "It is most preposterous that ladies should be left in the snow for an hour. Well, young men, what sport have you had?"

"I shot the big black cock," said Harry.

"Did you," indeed?" said Kate Coverdale.

"And here are the feathers out of his tail for you. He dropped them in the water, and I had to go in after them up to my middle. But I told you that I would, so I was determined to get them."

"Oh, you silly, silly boy," said Kate. "But I'll keep them forever, I will, indeed." This was said a little apart, for Harry had managed to draw the young lady aside before he presented the feathers.

Frank had also his trophies for Patty, and the tale to tell of his own prowess. In that he was a year older than his brother, he was by a year's growth less ready to tender his present to his lady love, openly in the presence of them all. But he found his opportunity, and then he and Patty went on a little in advance. Kate also was deep in her consolations to Harry for his ducking; and therefore the four disposed of themselves in the manner previously suggested by Miss Holmes. Miss Holmes, therefore, and her brother, and Bessy Garrow, were left together in the path, and discussed the performances of the day in a manner that elicited no very ecstatic interest. So they walked for a mile, and by degrees the conversation between them dwindled down almost to nothing.

"There is nothing I dislike so much as coming out with people younger than myself," said Miss Holmes. "One always feels so old and dull. Listen to those children there; they make me feel as though I were an old maiden aunt, brought out with them to do propriety."

"Patty won't at all approve if she hears you call her a child."

"Nor shall I approve if she treats me like an old woman," and then she stepped on and joined the children. "I wouldn't spoil even their sport if I could help it," she said to herself. "But with them I shall only be a temporary nuisance; if I remain behind I shall become a permanent evil." And thus Bessy and her old lover were left by themselves.

"I hope you will get on well with Bella," said Godfrey, when they had remained silent for a minute or two.

"Oh, yes. She is so good-natured and light-spirited that everybody must like her. She has been used to so much amusement and active life that I know she must find it very dull here."

"She is never dull anywhere—even at Liverpool, which, for a young lady, I sometimes think the dullest place on earth. I know it is for a man."

"A man who has work to do can never be dull, can he?"

"Indeed he can; as dull as death. I am so often enough. I have never been very bright there, Bessy, since you left us."

There was nothing in his calling her Bessy, for it had become a habit with him since they were children; and they had formerly agreed that everything between them should be as it had been before that foolish whisper of love had been spoken and received. Indeed, provision had been made by them specially on this point, so that there need be no awkwardness in this mode of addressing each other. Such provision had seemed to be very prudent, but it hardly had the desired effect on the present occasion.

"I hardly know what you mean by brightness," she said, after a pause. "Perhaps it is not intended that people's lives should be what you call bright."

"Life should be as bright as we can make it."

"It all depends on the meaning of the word. I suppose we are not very bright here at Thwaite Hall, but yet we think ourselves very happy."

"I am sure you are," said Godfrey. "I very often think of you here."

"We always think of places where we have been when we were young," said Bessy, and then again they walked on for some time in silence, and Bessy began to increase her pace with the view of catching the children. The present walk to her was anything but bright, and she bethought herself with dismay that there were still two miles before she reached the Ferry.

"Bessy," Godfrey said at last. And then he stopped as though he were doubtful how to proceed. She, however, did not say a word, but walked on quickly, as though her only hope was in catching the party before her. But they also were walking quickly, for Bella had determined that she would not be caught.

"Bessy, I must speak to you once of what passed between us at Liverpool."

"Must you?" said she.

"Unless you positively forbid it."

"Stop, Godfrey," she said. And they did stop in the path, for now she no longer thought of putting an end to her embarrassment by overtaking her companions. "If any such words are necessary for your comfort it would hardly become me to forbid them. Were I to speak so harshly you would accuse me afterwards in your own heart. It must be for you to judge whether it is well to reopen a wound that is nearly healed."

"But with me it is not nearly healed. The wound is open always."

"There are some hurts," she said, "which do not admit of an absolute and perfect cure, unless after long years." As she said so, she could not but think how much better was his chance of such perfect cure than her own. With her—so she said to herself—such curing was all but impossible; whereas with him, it was as impossible that the injury should last.

"Bessy," he said, and he again stopped her on the narrow path, standing immediately before her on the way, "you remember all the circumstances that made us part?"

"Yes; I think I remember them."

"And you still think we were right to part?"

She paused for a moment before she answered him; but it was only for a moment, and then she spoke quite firmly: "Yes, Godfrey, I do; I have thought about it much since then. I have thought, I fear, to no good purpose about aught else. But I have never thought that we had been unwise in that."

"And yet I think you loved me."

"I am bound to confess I did so, as otherwise I must confess myself a liar. I told you at the time that I loved you, and I told you so truly. But it is better, ten times better, that those who love should part, even though they still should love, than that two should be joined together who are incapable of making each other happy. Remember what you told me."

"I do remember."

"You found yourself unhappy in your engagement, and you said it was my fault."

"Bessy, there is my hand. If you have ceased to love me, there is an end of it. But if you love me still, let all that be forgotten."

"Forgotten, Godfrey! How can it be forgotten? You were unhappy, and it was my fault. My fault, as it would be if I tried to solace a sick child with arithmetic, or feed a dog with grass. I had no right to love you, knowing you as I did; and knowing also that my ways would not be your ways. My punishment I understand, and it is not more than I can bear; but I had hoped that your punishment would have been soon over."

"You are too proud, Bessy."

"That is very likely. Frank says that I am a Puritan, and pride was the worst of their sins."

"Too proud and unbending. In marriage should not the man and woman adapt themselves to each other?"

"When they are married, yes. And every girl who thinks of marrying should know that in very much she must adapt herself to her husband. But I do not think that a woman should be the ivy, to take the direction of every branch of the tree to which she clings. If she does so, what can be her own character? But we must go on, or we shall be too late."

"And you will give me no other answer?"

"None other, Godfrey. Have you not just now, at this very moment, told me that I was too proud? Can it be possible that you should wish to tie yourself for life to female pride? And if you tell me that now, at such a moment as this, what would you tell me in the close intimacy of married life, when the trifles of every day would have worn away the courtesies of guest and lover?"

There was a sharpness of rebuke in this which Godfrey Holmes could not at the moment overcome. Nevertheless he knew the girl, and understood the workings of her heart and mind. Now, in her present state, she could be unbending, proud, and almost rough. In that she had much to lose in declining the renewed offer which he made her, she would as it were, continually prompt herself to be harsh and inflexible. Had he been poor, had she not loved him, had not all good things seemed to have attended the promise of such a marriage, she would have been less suspicious of herself in receiving the offer, and more gracious in replying to it. Had he lost all his money before he came back to her, she would have taken him at once; or had he been deprived of an eye or become crippled in his legs she would have done so. But, circumstanced as he was, she had no motive to tenderness. There was an organic defect in her character, which no doubt was plainly marked by its own bump in her cranium—the bump of philomartyrdom, it might properly be called. She had shipwrecked her own happiness in rejecting Godfrey Holmes; but it seemed to her to be the proper thing that a well-behaved young lady should shipwreck her own happiness. For the last month or two she had been tossed about by the waters and was nearly drowned. Now there was beautiful land again close to her, and a strong, pleasant hand stretched out to save her. But though she had suffered terribly among the waves, she still thought it wrong to be saved. It would be so pleasant to take that hand, so sweet, so joyous, that it surely must be wrong. That was her doctrine; and Godfrey Holmes, though he hardly analyzed the matter, partly understood that it was so. And yet, if once she were landed on that green island, she would be so happy. She spoke with scorn of a woman clinging to a tree like ivy; and yet, were she once married, no woman would cling to her husband with sweeter feminine tenacity than Bessy Garrow. He spoke no further word to her as he walked home, but in handing her down to the ferryboat he pressed her hand. For a second it seemed as though she had returned this pressure. If so, the action was involuntary, and her hand instantly resumed its stiffness to his touch.

It was late that night when Major Garrow went to his bedroom, but his wife was still up waiting for him. "Well," said she, "what has he said to you? He has been with you above an hour."

"Such stories are not very quickly told, and in this case it was necessary to understand him very accurately. At length I think I do understand him."

It is not necessary to repeat at length all that was said on that night between Major and Mrs. Garrow, as to the offer which had now for a third time been made to their daughter. On that evening, after the ladies had gone, and when the two boys had taken themselves off, Godfrey Holmes told his tale to his host, and had honestly explained to him what he believed to be the state of his daughter's feelings. "Now you know all," said he. "I do believe that she loves me, and if she does, perhaps she may still listen to you." Major Garrow did not feel sure that he "knew it all." But when he had fully discussed the matter that night with his wife, then he thought that perhaps he had arrived at that knowledge.

On the following morning Bessy learned from the maid, at an early hour, that Godfrey Holmes had left Thwaite Hall and gone back to Liverpool. To the girl she said nothing on the subject, but she felt obliged to say a word or two to Bella. "It is his coming that I regret," she said; "that he should have had the trouble and annoyance for nothing. I acknowledge that it was my fault, and I am very sorry."

"It cannot be helped," said Miss Holmes, somewhat gravely. "As to his misfortunes, I presume that his journeys between here and Liverpool are not the worst of them."

After breakfast on that day Bessy was summoned into her father's book room, and found him there and her mother also. "Bessy," said he, "sit down, my dear. You know why Godfrey has left us this morning?"

Bessy walked round the room, so that in sitting she might be close to her mother and take her mother's hand in her own. "I suppose I do, papa," she said.

"He was with me late last night, Bessy; and when he told me what had passed between you I agreed with him that he had better go."

"It was better that he should go, papa."

"But he has left a message for you."

"A message, papa?"

"Yes, Bessy. And your mother agrees with me that it had better be given to you. It is this, that if you will send him word to come again, he will be here by Twelfth night. He came before on my invitation, but if he returns it must be on yours."

"Oh, papa, I cannot."

"I do not say that you can, but think of it calmly before you altogether refuse. You will give me your answer on New Year's morning."

"Mamma knows that it would be impossible," said Bessy.

"Not impossible, dearest."

"In such a matter you should do what you believe to be right," said her father.

"If I were to ask him here again it would be telling him that I would——"

"Exactly, Bessy. It would be telling him that you would be his wife. He would understand it so, and so would your mother and I. It must be so understood altogether."

"But, papa, when we were at Liverpool——"

"I have told him everything, dearest," said Mrs. Garrow.

"I think I understand the whole," said the Major; "and in such a matter as this I will not give you counsel on either side. But you must remember that in making up your mind, you must think of him as well as of yourself. If you do not love him—if you feel that as his wife you should not love him, there is not another word to be said. I need not explain to my daughter that under such circumstances she would be wrong to encourage the visits of a suitor. But your mother says you do love him."

"Oh, mamma!"

"I will not ask you. But if you do; if you have so told him, and allowed him to build up an idea of his life happiness on such telling, you will, I think, sin greatly against him by allowing a false feminine pride to mar his happiness. When once a girl has confessed to a man that she loves him, the confession and the love together put upon her the burden of a duty toward him, which she cannot with impunity throw aside." Then he kissed her, and bidding her give him a reply on the morning of the new year, left her with her mother.

She had four days for consideration, and they went past her by no means easily. Could she have been alone with her mother the struggle would not have been so painful; but there was the necessity that she should talk to Isabella Holmes, and the necessity also that she should not neglect the Coverdales. Nothing could have been kinder than Bella. She did not speak on the subject till the morning of the last day, and then only in a very few words. "Bessy," she said, "as you are great, be merciful."

"But I am not great, and it would not be mercy."

"As to that," said Bella, "he has surely a right to his own opinion."

On that evening she was sitting alone in her room when her mother came to her, and her eyes were red with weeping. Pen and paper were before her, as though she were resolved to write, but hitherto no word had been written.

"Well, Bessy," said her mother, sitting down close beside her; "is the deed done?"

"What deed, mamma? Who says that I am to do it?"

"The deed is not the writing, but the resolution to write. Five words will be sufficient—if only those five words may be written."

"It is for one's whole life, mamma. For his life, as well as my own."

True, Bessy; that is quite true. But equally true whether you bid him come or allow him to remain away. That task of making up one's mind for life, must at last be done in some special moment of that life."

"Mamma, mamma; tell me what I should do."

But this Mrs. Garrow would not do. "I will write the words for you if you like," she said, "but it is you who must resolve that they shall be written. I cannot bid my darling go away and leave me for another home—I can only say that in my heart I do believe that home would be a happy one."

It was morning before the note was written, but when the morning came Bessy had written it and brought it to her mother. "You must take it to papa," she said. Then she went and hid herself from all eyes till the noon had passed. "Dear Godfrey," the letter ran, "Papa says that you will return on Wednesday if I write to ask you. Do come back to us, if you wish it. Yours always, Bessy."

"It is as good as though she had filled the sheet," said the Major. But in sending it to Godfrey Holmes, he did not omit a few accompanying remarks of his own.

An answer came from Godfrey by return of post; and on the afternoon of the 6th of January, Frank Garrow drove over to the station at Penrith to meet him. On their way back to Thwaite Hall there grew up a very close confidence between the two future brothers-in-law, and Frank explained with great perspicuity a little plan which he had arranged himself.

"As soon as it is dark, so that she won't see it, Harry will hang it up in the dining room," he said, "and mind you go in there before you go anywhere else."

"I am very glad you have come back, Godfrey," said the Major, meeting him in the hall.

"God bless you, dear Godfrey," said Mrs. Garrow, "you will find Bessy in the dining room," she whispered; but in so whispering she was quite unconscious of the mistletoe bough.

And so also was Bessy, nor do I think that she was much more conscious when that introduction was over. Godfrey had made all manner of promises to Frank, but when the moment arrived he had found the moment too important for any special reference to the little bough above his head. Not so, however, Patty Coverdale. "It's a shame," she said, bursting out of the room, "and if I'd known what you had done, nothing on earth should have induced me to go in. I won't enter the room till I know that you have taken it out." Nevertheless her sister Kate was bold enough to solve the mystery before the evening was over.

They Mistook the Situation.

From the Detroit Free Press.

The driver of a one-horse vehicle loaded with boxes halted on Gratiot avenue and got down and stood off a few feet and looked earnestly at the horse. Four or five pedestrians came to a halt, and one of them promptly called out:

"That horse has got a chill and you ought to unhitch him!"

"It's a case of the bots!" added a second.

"He's got the blind staggers, or I don't know anything about horses," put in a third.

The four or five pedestrians grew to five or ten, and then to twenty or thirty.

"He's balky, eh?" queried a fat man as he forced his way into the crowd.

"Holler in his ear!" shouted a boy, who was up on balky horses.

"All you fellers git hold and push the wagin!" commanded a citizen, who appeared to be a born leader of men.

The crowd grew to fifty—eighty—a hundred, and the street was blocked. Men examined the wheels of the wagon, the feet of the horse, and the harness. The driver stood there with lines and whip in hand, but said nothing and made no move until a policeman forced his way into the crowd and excitedly asked:

"Now, then, what's all this about? What's the matter here?"

"Nuthin'," was the calm reply.

"Horse sick?"

"Naw."

"Is he balky?"

"Naw."

"Then why don't you go on?"

"I'm goin'."

And he put his foot on the hub of a front wheel and sprang to his seat and drove off at a sharp trot.

UNCLE BAILEY AND AUNT HANNER.

A Pathetic Tale of the Hemlock Belt, as Told by a Native.

I was trout fishing one day on Barley Run in the Hemlock Belt, and suddenly, at a bend in the creek, came upon a typical native of that locality, sitting on the bank in pensive mood. He heard me as I approached and looked up.

"Cap'n," said he, "I'm settin' here right on the spot where I fust met Aunt Hanner. Aunt Hanner died yisterday, an' I've come over here to gaze an' ponder. I was terrible fond of Aunt Hanner, though she did kill Uncle Bailey, an' tha wa'n't nobody ever lived that I thought more of than I did of Uncle Bailey. An' she killed him. Yet I liked Aunt Hanner amazin'. She was a wonder. She had forty-eight young uns, Aunt Hanner did, an' I killed 'em all. Every one of 'em. Long afore she killed Uncle Bailey, too. An' right here is where I fust met Aunt Hanner, Cap'n. So I've come over to gaze an' ponder."

I began to feel a little uneasy, for here was evidently a bushwhacker as crazy as a loon, and there was a blood-curdling preponderance of murderous reference in his talk. I turned quickly and started back up the creek, but the native called to me.

"Hold on, Cap'n!" said he. "You better wait a spell. I want to tell ye 'bout Uncle Bailey an' Aunt Hanner. It'll be wuth your while. Arter ye hear about 'em ye'll be sorry ye never know'd 'em. They was great!"

Thinking it might be safer to humor the man than to offend him by going away, I stopped and said:

"All right. What about them?"

"Never know'd Hiram Teepy, did ye?" said the native.

"No," I replied. "I never met him."

"Properest kind of a feller," continued the man on the bank. "Married Mag Fincher, Hiram did. But that wa'n't what made me think of him. T'backer's what made me think of Hiram. Plug t'backer. He allus carried a big hunk o' plug t'backer, an' whenever I'd meet him he'd allus haul out his plug an' say:

"'Hullo! Hev a chaw?'

"An', o' course—but say! If ye didn't know Hiram ye know plug t'backer. Got any?"

It happened that I had some, and I promptly handed it over. The native took the plug, bit off a big chew, and put the rest in his pocket.

"'Tain't noways nigh as sweet as Hiram's usety be," said he, "but 'tain't bad. Lord! How Uncle Bailey did dote on plug t'backer! But now he's gone, an' Aunt Hanner's gone, an' here I set an' ponder!"

I thought that now was a good chance for me to get away, and I started quietly up the creek again. But the man called to me before I had gone six feet.

"Jest a minute, Cap'n!" said he. "If ye don't stop an' hear about Uncle Bailey an' Aunt Hanner ye'll regret it to your dyin' day!"

So I stopped and sat down on a rock.

"An' it wa'n't remorse for Uncle Bailey, ner it wa'n't weepin' an' wailin' fer her young uns, that killed Aunt Hanner!" the pondering native went on. "No! It was shame! Ginuine, downright shame is what Aunt Hanner died of! Aunt Hanner was too modest an' she couldn't stan' it, so she up an' died yesterday. If Uncle Bailey wasn't gone he'd be settin' here a ponderin' too, fer Aunt Hanner was pertic'lar fond of Uncle Bailey, an' well he know'd it. It was jist 'cause she was so pertic'lar fond of him that she killed him.

"Five years ago I went over to Bill Belcher's pond. The fact is, Cap'n, the pond wa'n't Bill Belcher's, 'cause tha wa'n't no Bill Belcher, an' when tha was a Bill Belcher he never owned the pond. Tha hain't ben no Bill Belcher fer twenty year. The last day tha ever was a Bill Belcher he went fishin' on that pond. If the fishin' hadn't ben so oncommon good that day Bill mowt be with us yet. Bill had half a pint o' fishworms with him in a t'mater can, an' half a gallon o' worm o' the still in a jug. This was fer exhilaratin' purposes. Bill allus exhilarated arter ketchin' a fish, but the fish bit so fast that day that they kep' him busier than usual exhilaratin', so that when folks went to look for Bill an' found the boat upsot an' Bill an' the jug floatin' in the pond, tha was less than two little jiggers of exhilaration left in the jug; but tha was more'n five gallon o' water in Bill. It wa'n't drowndin' that killed Bill, some folks thought. They said it was the suddent washin' of all the exhilaration out of him by so much water gittin' inter him that done it, Bill not bein' used to setch overpowerin' disapp'intment. An' that's the way Bill got the title to the pond, so it's ben called Bill Belcher's pond ever sence.

"Yes. I went over there to set some mushrat traps, an' as I was rowin' 'crosst the inlet o' the pond I seen sumpin' a skippin' to'ards my boat on top o' the water, an' a-comin' as if somebody had shot it outen a gun. It wa'n't a very big sumpin', an' I thought it amazin' queer that it could leave setch a big wake as was follerin' of it, an' follerin' of it close. When the sumpin' got nigh the boat I see that it was a frog, an' mebbe its eyes wa'n't hangin' out on its cheeks nor nothin'! An' good reason for it. What I thought was a wake behind the frog wa'n't a wake at all. It was the slamminest biggest picker'l I ever see, an' from the way its jaws was throw'd open I know'd it was pinin' fer that frog. When the frog was sumpin' like ten foot from the boat, and the pinin' picker'l wa'n't more'n three inches from the frog's hind legs, the frog give one overpowerin' hump an' kick, riz up in the air like a skyrocket, and come down kerplunk inter the boat. It cuddled down 'twixt my feet and looked at me with its bulgin' eyes, an' if it could a' talked nine different languages it couldn't a' said to me no plainer in words than what them eyes did:

"'Say, mister!' says they, 'please don't let that picker'l climb in here an' chaw me!'

"Well, sir, I riz right up in my boat, an' takin' an oar I fit an' fit that picker'l till at last he made up his mind that if he got the frog he'd hef to git away with the oar, an' me, an' part o' the boat, so he turned tail an' went back to where he come from. Ye never see nothin' as glad as that frog was. He hopped an' skipped around in that boat, an' rubbed hisself agin me like a purrin' cat. He stayed by me all day, an' follered me home. An' he stayed there. He took up his quarters in my spring. He lived there, an' he grow'd an' he grow'd. An' he got smarter than I'd like to tell ye. He wa'n't long a-makin' the diskiv'ry that my natur' was pertic'lar strong as to sleepin', an' that I hankered arter sleepin' in the grass, an' out in the orchard, an' on the back stoop. An' he diskivered that a weak p'int in my natur' was bein' woke up by flies. So he took to watchin' over me when the strong part o' my natur' was actin', an' to ketchin' the flies as they come buzzin' round to tickle the weak part o' my natur' out o' me, so's the strong part had it all its own way, an' arter that I slep' as peaceful as babies with paregoric in 'em. Gratitude? Why, gratitude stuck out all over that frog in chunks!"

The native fell to pondering again, and I was on the point of getting up and making a break for the woods, when he roused up and said:

"Bill Belcher was an uncommon good fisherman. One o' the best. That's the reason he never went a-fishin' without takin' exhilarator with him. All good fishermen does. How do you size up, Cap'n, as to bein' a fisherman?"

The hint was too evident, and I handed the native my flask. He took it.

"Half pint, hay?" said he. "You'm jist beginnin' to learn to fish, I see. I'm a leetle disapp'inted. I thought I mowt be talkin' to a good fisherman. Good ones allus carries a quart."

The native placed his thumb half way down the flask as a marker. Then he drank down to the mark and abstractedly shoved the flask into his pocket to keep company with my tobacco. I began to think he was eccentric rather than dangerous, and by and by I said:

"And your Uncle Bailey and Aunt Hannah?"

"My Uncle Bailey Hutch," the man promptly responded, "was as proper a chap as ever sot in anybody's tavern an' waited to be asked. But he run ag'in two big lumps of hard luck. One was that he got married. T'other un was that he married Aunt Hanner. Aunt Hanner's disposition was sot sumpin' like a cross-cut saw, an' when she got to movin' she was a ripper. An' the trouble was that she was movin' most o' the time. Wunst she swatted Uncle Bailey over, an' then sot on him till she peeled more'n a bushel o' taters. Aunt Hanner weighed sumpin' like two hundred pound, an' ev'ry time Uncle Bailey 'd wiggle she'd scrunch down on him.

"'She scrunched down so fur, by an' by Uncle Bailey usety say in tellin' about it, 'that I got my eyes on the shinin' shore, an' I was hopin' that Hanner'd give me another twist so's I could git my feet on it, but she wa'n't through with me yit, an' didn't let me pass over.'

"That'll give ye an inklin' as to Aunt Hanner, Cap'n. But one day Uncle Bailey got an idee. Banty Huff had an ol' churnin' ram that was dead sot ag'in women folks, an' none of 'em dast go nigh him, though he was meek as a lamb to men folks. One day Uncle Bailey was goin' by Banty's, an' he see a long piece o' rope at the side o' the road. This was what give him the idee, an' he picked up the rope an' carried it home. Wrappin' it round a post he went in the house.

"'Hanner,' says he, 'I've fetched home a nice piece o' rope.'

"'Good!' snaps out Aunt Hanner. 'Now ye kin hang yerself!'

"So Aunt Hanner went an' looked out to see the rope.

"'Ding your picture!' she hollered to Uncle Bailey. 'An' you've got that rantankerous ol' ram of Banty Huff's to the end o' the rope!'

"Uncle Bailey he jist grinned an' said nothin'. Aunt Hanner grabbed the axe an' started for the ram. Uncle Bailey looked out o' the door an' kep' a grinnin'. The ram seen Aunt Hanner a comin', an' went to meet her. He met her so suddent ag'in her bread basket that she curled up like a ship-knee, kicked a little, an' didn't git up from where she landed.

"'Aunt Hanner passed away a good deal peaceffuller than I thought it was in her natur' to,' Uncle Bailey usety say, tellin' of it.

"An' Uncle Bailey lived a widderer all the rest o' his life. When that frog o' mine turned out to be so pleasin', I thought I couldn't do better by him than to name him arter Uncle Bailey, an' I done it. Two years ago last spring I was fishin' this creek, an' jist as I got right on this spot where I'm ponderin' I heerd sumpin' sing out. I know'd what she was, an' I looked ahead an' see her layin' here, all curled up, yaller an' glistenin', an' buzzin' away an' lookin' sassy, I tell ye!

"'You'm too han'some an' snappy to waste!' says I. 'I'll jist take you home an' give ye a chance.'

"So I snared her with my shoestring an' took her home an' put her in a box. Lord! but she did jist more than sing an' cut up an' show her temper!

"'Jist like Aunt Hanner, by spoons!' I says, an' I named her Aunt Hanner there an' then. Next mornin', when I went out to take a look at her, I faltered, Cap'n, I faltered. Out of ev'ry crink an' crack an' cranny of the box wigglin' little pictur's of Aunt Hanner was crawlin'.

"'Not much!' I says. 'Aunt Hanner's all right, but I hain't wantin' any cousins a-growin' up here with Aunt Hanner's natur' in 'em.'

"So I gethered up the younguns an' made 'em give up the ghost, one an' all. The' was forty-eight of 'em, all born durin' the night. Aunt Hanner had had more p'ints than I had noticed about her, an' I took to her more'n ever. But she was sassier'n ever, an' wouldn't eat nothin'. She rattled an' she tore around in her box for three months, an' hadn't eat a thing. One mornin' I went out to take a look at her, an' she was gone. A knot had tumbled out of a board in the box, an' she had crawled out o' the hole. I hunted fer her an' I hunted fer her, an' long to'ards night I come on to her layin' in my 'tater patch. The most astoundin' p'int about her then was the tip ends of a frog's hind feet stickin' out of her mouth. The rest o' the frog was pooty well down to'ards her innards.

"'She's gobbled Uncle Bailey!' I hollered, an' so she had.

"But tha wa'n't nothin' to be done fer him, so I gethered Aunt Hanner up an' put her back in her box. In the course of two or three days she had absorbed all of Uncle Bailey an' was as peaceful as a dove. She eat ev'rything I give her, an' she was so friendly that I let her out o' the box. She made herself useful, I tell ye! She kep' the dogs away from the chickens, an' hunted up hen's nests fer me, and fetched the eggs in reg'lar. She come out strong on lightnin' rod peddlers an' patent hay-fork agents, an' they usety go by my place a-hummin'. But she was greatest on tax collectors. The money Aunt Hanner saved me in taxes the two year an' better that she had the run o' my clearin' kep' me in cider an' t'backer. When I'd see a tax collector p'intin' fer the cabin I'd holler:

"'Aunt Hanner! Taxes!'

"Then Aunt Hanner'd come a sailin' along, her head up an' her eyes a snappin' an' her latter end jist a buzzin', an' away 'd go that tax collector so fast ye could play checkers on his coat tails, they stuck out so stiff an' straight. An' now Aunt Hanner's dead, an' I'm settin' here a gazin' an' a ponderin'. Died o' shame, too. 'Bout twicet a year Aunt Hanner had a way a changin' her clo'es. She'd hursel off her old skin an' come out all dressed up in a shiny new one. But she was so awful modest that she'd go 'way some'rs where I couldn't see her make the change. Yisterday, though, I see her stealin' away, an' I know'd she was goin' to undress an' dress up, an', unbeknownst to her, I tollered her an' watched her to see how the proceedin' was done. She never seen me till she had stripped off her ol' duds an' was pooty as a pictur' in her new ones. Then she cuddled down an' tried to hide away from me, and the blood rushed clean from her rattles to her face, till she was blushin' red as a piny. She give me one reproachin' look, an' turned her head away. Aunt Hanner was dead. I had seen her makin' her toilet, and she jist natur'ly couldn't git over the shame of it, an' it killed her!"

The native took my flask from his pocket and emptied it. Throwing it away, he rose and said:

"I hope the next time ye come along here, Cap'n, that ye'v learned to be a good enough fisherman to carry a quart, fer I mowt be ponderin' here agin."

Then the native went away into the woods, and I resumed my fishing. ED MOTT.

LIFE IN A SODHOUSE.

Not So Pleasant as It Might Be, Especially for the Housewife.

From the Chicago Times.

On a new farm in western Nebraska the house is a very inconspicuous object. The eye wanders over immense grain fields, perhaps a large timber claim of young box elders and cottonwoods, a garden, a roomy stock yard, and the sod roofs of many sheds for poultry, stock, and machinery; but except for a wreath of smoke or the chance reflection of a window pane, the dwelling would be overlooked.

It is often of the half-dugout half-sodhouse order of architecture, the back part hollowed out of the side of a low hill, and the front of the squares of sod, merely placed together and all upheld by a slight frame of wood, with a door and one or two window casings, and perhaps a few rafters overhead. It is very small and low and serves the single purpose of shelter. There is a possibility even of its failure in this, and the trap door aslant at one side of the house proclaims the cyclone cave—ordinarily the receptacle for milk and butter.

Life in one of these prairie dwellings is certainly getting close to nature and the primitive; closer, perhaps, than the Arab tribes of the desert, who, on the whole, observe more laws, religious and secular, and have less solitude and social deprivation. To realize this, one has only to fancy a man and wife in a sodhouse fifteen miles from the nearest village, in one of the sparsely settled districts of western Nebraska. For days, and in some seasons for weeks, they see no human beings outside of their own household. Even begging Indians and tramps are almost unknown in this country. Prairie dogs cast up their mounds and found towns in the unmolested spots about the place; gophers and field mice burrow through the sod walls of the house; not infrequently snakes swing themselves down from the rafters inside, or crawl in at the door to get at any milk pans standing about. At night coyotes and some of the gray wolves come up through the cañon and skulk about the poultry yard or howl close to the windows. Through the day, while the man is in the fields, the herding usually falls to the woman's lot. Probably each takes a noon luncheon in a paper, to save coming back to the house until night.

The woman attends to her necessary household duties, throws a gunny sack over her broncho's back, jumps astride, rounds up the cattle, and drives them down the cañons to graze on the steep sides, or in a low strip beside a creek. Cañons are not sociable places; one can scarcely have a conception of the primeval unless he has walked through a cañon. He thinks of the dawn of creation, of the races of extinct mammoths, and wonders if centaurs have not merely retired into the inner caverns. What the sodhouse woman thinks about all day long in solitude like that it is hard to tell—the mortgage on the farm, diseases among the stock, the prospects of the crops, the time when they can put up their frame dwellings, the hard, unadorned facts in the treadmill of her life; she makes new plans for the work, work, work, which is her sole law of existence. Perhaps she has memories of another time, other surroundings, but they must seem vague and far away. Even the weather is monotonous; there is practically always the cloudless sky, the brilliant sun, the strong, dry wind, that curls the leaves of the young corn and turns the buffalo grass brown.

Women, and men, too, become withered and prematurely old. Hair and skin take on the general tint of things about them. Their teeth drop out without a thought of replacing them. And there comes a certain feverish look in their eyes—a look of intensified expectation, a straining into the future. They lose all thought of appearance; it gets to mean vanity rather than self-respect to them. Such a life must have its inevitable mental and moral effect. All the sensitive, the esthetic, sometimes the moral sense itself, becomes atrophied. The tragedies of a city are unearthed and brought to light, but the silent tragedies of these desolate lives are swallowed up and lost in the remoteness and immensity of the prairie wastes.

It is a motley assortment of humanity that takes the claims and homesteads on the opening up of a country like this. Ex-cowboys, who have come to admit the claims of a single wife and family, confirmed pioneers who move with the advance of railroads, people of refinement and reverses of fortune, many Russian and German immigrants, and a sprinkling of all the other nations of the earth. After the first rush a sifting process sets in which soon separates them into three classes: Those who stay through everything and make the prosperity of the country, the non-progressive, who never get beyond the original sodhouse, and the shifting transients who move at a sign of trouble and come back in a time of prosperity.

There is, however, no sifting social process during these first years. The sodhouse levels all ranks, and at the rare intervals when any of the people are brought together socially it is on terms of perfect equality; they simply take one another for granted, with no question of antecedents, family history, or social advantages. They are people who are starting life anew and living on hopes of the future, with forgetfulness of the past and endurance of the present.

A woman's lot is the harder; she misses more things in such a life than a man does. If she is strong enough, mentally and physically, to endure it until they come into better things, she lives out her allotted time unpraised and unrewarded of this world. If she has a mental bias toward the morbid or melancholy, she is in danger of adding one to the list of the women in the hospital for the insane at Lincoln.

The real pioneers, who survive everything in the end have comfortable homes and have created some advantages for their children. They have lived in the sodhouse until the year of a good crop and few household necessities to be bought, and have had the small, bare, frame cottage built. The next season, if good fortune continues, a porch and an "L" are added, and in a few years it is enlarged and comfortably fitted up. Often the old sodhouse is left standing near the new one for some purpose, or sometimes as a matter of sentiment.